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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/07/2013

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SUBJECT: FEELING IGNORED BY KABUL, PANJSHIRIS PULL INWARD

Classified By: Acting DCM Alan Yu for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) Despite having achieved unrivaled success in governance and security, Panjshiris appear to be turning increasingly away from Kabul as they see little attention paid to their valley by those in the national government, including other prominent Panjshiris. Evidence of this can be heard in public speeches, as well as in private meetings and shuras. This disaffection was also reflected in an isolated RPG attack earlier this year on the PRT by impoverished ex-Mujahedeen looking to call attention to their plight. The net effect of this perceived neglect, along with a sense of deteriorating security in surrounding provinces, will likely result in Panjshir becoming increasingly provincial in outlook and detached from Kabul. End Summary.

THE LAND OF MASSOUD -- A VERY PROVINCIAL PROVINCE

¶2. (C) While the Panjshir Valley of Afghanistan is only about 60 miles from Kabul, it might as well be a thousand given the insular perspective of many Panjshiris, and their low expectations of the central government. Panjshiris define themselves by their geography (a mountainous valley), their ethnicity (Tajik), and their history (the legendary Massoud, and resistance to foreign invaders). Most Panjshiris, would probably self-identify as Panjshiris first, Tajiks second, and Afghans third.

¶3. (C) This resistance to outsiders has created a near obsession on the part of provincial officials with securing Panjshir's borders. While the mountainous geography of the valley already affords Panjshir a high-degree of security, it is augmented by Afghan National Police (ANP) checkpoints at the entrance to the valley (&Lion,s Gate8), and other strategic vantage points. Additionally, the ANP and National Directorate of Security (NDS) routinely deploy plainclothes patrols in the valley. Even wandering Kuchi nomads are required to individually register at a police checkpoint as they enter and depart the valley through the Lion,s Gate. Virtually no major improvements in the valley, including PRT-funded road projects, are undertaken without being viewed

through the optic of security.

IGNORED BY KABUL?

¶4. (C) In conversations with Panjshiris, from the Governor to elders in remote villages, a recurring theme emerges) Panjshiris perceive they are being neglected by the national government in Kabul. Whether in private to the PRT, or at public gatherings, Panjshir Governor Haji Bahlol makes clear his view that the national government in Kabul is all but absent in Panjshir. On several occasions the Governor has reminded the PRT that he has not seen President Karzai in Panjshir in well over two years, nor has he seen much activity from Karzai,s ministers. At the last Task Force regional Governors, Conference, no ministers from Kabul were in attendance, and Bahlol openly chided one of the two deputy ministers present (Public Works, and Water and Power) for participating for only half a day. For the most part, Bahlol views the ministry line directors as either incompetent or lacking support from their ministries.

¶5. (C) Bahlol has recently confided to the PRT that he believes Karzai is deliberately playing-up civilian casualty counts from coalition military action, and is cozying-up a little too closely with China and Russia. He found Karzai,s invitation to Russia to send police trainers particularly unpalatable, noting the many ex-Mujahedeen in Panjshir who are missing limbs courtesy of the Soviets. Further, Bahlol told the PRT that he believes Karzai fears him, as Bahlol is willing to openly challenge the President. In conversations with the PRT, he has also referred to Karzai as having &Taliban8 roots.

¶6. (C) Bahlol is not alone in his disenchantment with the central government. At a typical shura of elders in the remote Shahrbeland village in the northern district of Paryan, the elders told the PRT that Karzai was doing a poor job with security, as evidenced by the deteriorating situation in other provinces. Khenj District Administrator Mohammad Said, viewed by the PRT as the most effective of Panjshir,s seven district administrators, asserted that no one from the national government was working to meet the needs of Panjshir. He said if the PRT wanted to see a photo of the only Afghan official working for Afghanistan, it would be &a picture of a donkey.8

FEELING ABANDONED BY PROMINENT PANJSHIRIS

¶7. (S) Ironically, Panjshiris hold key positions in Kabul disproportionate to Panjshir,s size, including First Vice President Ahmad Zia Massoud, NDS Chief Amrullah Saleh, and Army Chief of Staff Bismillah Khan. Adding to this circle of influence are former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, and former Defense Minister Marshall Fahim. Some Panjshiri ex-Mujahedeen assert that these powerful ex-Mujahedeen in Kabul have forgotten their kinsmen in Panjshir, who, after fighting the Soviets and Taliban, lack the skills to find work (other than subsistence farming) evidenced by an estimated 60 percent unemployment rate.

¶8. (S) In an isolated incident, three of these ex-Mujahedeen fired RPGs at the PRT,s Communication Site in June. The attack took place at 9:30 pm when the site is normally unoccupied except for a small local guard force. Following an investigation with the assistance of Embassy LEGAT, the Governor, and NDS, the men were identified and eventually interviewed by the PRT following their arrest and incarceration. The men told the PRT their attack was not directed at the PRT or U.S. interests in general; rather they wanted to get the attention of the ex-Mujahedeen in Kabul (specifically Saleh, Fahim, and Khan) who had &abandoned8 their brothers-in-arms in Panjshir. The men added that they had been disarmed through the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and Disbandment of Illegally Armed Groups

(DIAG) Processes, and could no longer feed or protect their families.

&TURN OFF YOUR CAMERAS...8

¶9. (C) At a recent PRT-funded school opening, and separately at a PRT-funded clinic ground-breaking, Governor Bahlol paused during his remarks, telling local media to &turn off your cameras and tape recorders.⁸ He then told the assemblies that these and other projects in the valley were not the result of any support from Kabul, but were from the generosity of the American people. The PRT, he said, was the only real source of development in Panjshir.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) Panjshir province is a paradox. The valley is a unique success story) it has strong governance, is poppy-free, and has unparalleled security -- effectively denying territory to insurgents. However, to a large degree, it has accomplished these feats in a vacuum of sorts, without strengthening ties to the central government, or the rest of Afghanistan -- both of which Panjshiris tend to view with suspicion.

¶11. (C) The tension between Panjshir and non-Panjshiris in Kabul is an old story. Still, the comments by Bahlol and others in the province appear to betray a growing dissatisfaction with President Karzai in particular, and the Afghan government in general. Furthermore, from the perspective of many in the valley, the powerful Panjshiris in Kabul are either incapable or unwilling to serve as the patrons of their Panjshiri brethren.
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